

I AM MALALA A BOOK REFLECTION

S.Rajesh Khanna, M.Phil Research Scholar

B.Poornima, III B.Sc. Psychology

I am Malala by Malala Yousafzai. Published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Manipal, 2013

“If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman,” said Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. A woman is such a being. Though her status was once trod on by a society full of male chauvinists, she has withstood every problem she has had to encounter, breaking stigmas and stereotypes to attain a position in society equal to the opposite gender. But this is just the creamy layer that we see. It is a source of remorse to contemplate on the fact that women and girls in various countries lack basic human rights. Somalia, the Niger, Liberia, Mali, and Burkina Faso are the top five countries that encourage education for females, with Pakistan standing in the 7th place with 62% of illiterate women, according to the World Inequality Database in Education, WIDE. When someone asks social scientists how to end global poverty, the only answer that they hear is “Educate girls!” When this happens, one watches a community change: its per capita income shoots up, infant mortality goes down, the rate of economic growth increases, with a concomitant fall in the rate of HIV/AIDS infections, and child marriage and child labour becoming increasingly less common. According to the World Bank's statistics, if Kenya's illiterate girls are educated, the country's economy will be boosted by \$27 billion in the course of a lifetime. Regardless of whether or not an emerging nation concedes that it is indeed so, there is no gain saying the fact that its girls are its greatest resource.

Whether an emerging nation finds it legitimate or not, its girls are its greatest resource. Educating girls, as economist Lawrence Summers once said, “... may be the single highest-return investment available in the developing world.”

Eleanor Roosevelt famously declared, “A woman is like a tea bag - you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.” Malala Yousafzai, aptly, was an outcome of such a revolution. Born of an

ambitious father and an illiterate mother, Malala was one of the few girls celebrated by her Pakistani family. She grew up in her father's school, had read Stephen Hawking's "A Brief History of Time" by age 11, and has been known to speak as powerfully and eloquently as her father.

The autobiography, **I am Malala**, could perhaps be considered one of a kind: both as an account of an extraordinary person's exceptional life, and for its writer having had the personal privilege of such a book being published at the tender age of 16.

This book is penned by Malala Yousafzai with distinguished British correspondent, Christina Lamb. **I am Malala** is a packed 293-page, 5-parts, 24-chapters book with a few enclosures, suffused with a girl's single-minded love for education and its indubitable power to touch the soul.

It surprises everybody that a buyer can walk into a bookstore and walk out without picking the book up, leaving it languishing behind on the shelves. Malala's picture on the cover could be likened to that of the Mona Lisa, but of the 21st century, her pretty eyes embodying the hopes and dreams of her people, if indeed it is agreed that eyes say more than mere words do. The initial chapters of the book describe the culture, tradition and lifestyle true of today's Pakistan. One would utterly fail to associate the face of Pakistan with bomb blasts, terrorism or religious fanaticism, as one reads about the breathtaking features of the Swat Valley, so beautiful that it is referred to as the "Kingdom of Mountains" or the "Switzerland of the East." **I Am Malala** is the remarkable tale of a family uprooted by global terrorism, of the fight for girls' education, of a father who, himself a school owner, championed and encouraged his daughter to write and to attend school. **I Am Malala** exhorts you to believe in the power of one person's voice to inspire change in the world. The book, adapted into the movie "**He Named Me Malala**," grabbed widespread attention.

Malala was born in 1997 of parents who hailed from Shangla, a remote part of Pakistan. After their marriage, they moved to the small town of Mingora in the Swat Valley district, just a hundred miles from Afghanistan. Malala's birth was not a cause for celebration, mostly

because she was a girl and also because the family was extremely poor and, consequently, unable to afford a big feast. Her father, Ziauddin, named her Malala - meaning grief-stricken - after a courageous woman who led the troops in battle against the British in 1880. Her mother, Toor Pekai, was illiterate but her father was a great speaker, deeply involved in environmental, social and political causes in and around the region. He was a debater during his stint at university and a head member of the students' union. He went on to become a teacher and decided to open schools with his friends and business partners. Contrary to the established practice of the time in the region's schools, Ziauddin built a school for both boys and girls at a time when education only for boys was encouraged and girls urged to stay home. The most forceful character in the book is Ziauddin, who shaped and helped Malala do as she desired with the independence and personal freedom accorded to her, notwithstanding the social restrictions practised in Pakistani society. The way he reared his children and treated his wife was far removed from the usual practices adopted by men in the Valley. Love and peace prevailed in the family. Talibanisation could be dealt a death blow today if families in the Swat Valley were headed by someone of Ziauddin's ilk.

The arrival of the Taliban in 2004 brought dramatic changes to the region. The Taliban set up radio broadcasts telling people to burn their books, CDs and DVDs, keep the girls away from school and, chiefly, to return to the old ways of Islam. The people of the region fell under the Taliban's spell because they came at a time when Pakistan had been very badly affected by a major earthquake, devastating floods and sundry natural disasters attributed to the wrath of God. Malala speaks of the Taliban in these lines, "Moniba and I had been reading the Twilight books and it seemed to us that the Taliban arrived in the night just like vampires. They appeared in groups, armed with knives and Kalashnikovs. These were strange-looking men with long, straggly hair and beards and camouflage vests over their shalwar kamiz, which they wore with the trousers well above the ankle. They had jogging shoes or cheap plastic sandals on their feet, and sometimes stockings over their heads with holes for their eyes, and they blew their noses dirtily into the ends of their turbans."

Abdul Hai Kakar, a Peshwar-based BBC radio correspondent, was searching for a “female teacher or a schoolgirl to write a diary about life under the Taliban.” The first girl chosen for the purpose was forbidden by her parents to do so. When Malala heard her father discuss the issue, she immediately volunteered to take up the perilous assignment. She arranged for a series of weekly telephone conversations with Hai Kakar, for about 30-45 minutes each, in Urdu. Hai Kakar would write up their conversations thereafter, and they would be published in the BBC's Urdu website once a week. Malala refers to Anne Frank's book and her experience of hiding from the Nazis in Holland as a “very powerful record” and tells readers that one must derive inspiration from one's own diary. Hai Kakar suggested the pseudonym Gul Makai - meaning 'cornflower'- to protect Malala's identity, and it is the name of the heroine in a Pashtun folk story. Soon, many people started following her blog, opening a new dimension in her life.

In her view, the “Taliban is against education because they think that when a child reads a book or learns English or studies science, he or she will become Westernized.” Yet, as she rightly points out, “... education is neither Eastern nor Western, it is human.” Her public stature increased, as did the Taliban terrorists' rage at her candour.

All the publicity from her speaking engagements had attracted the attention of the Taliban and resulted in death threats from them, putting Malala and her father at great risk, with their very lives in jeopardy. As a result, Malala no longer walked anywhere alone. She rode a rickshaw to school and took a bus home from school, though she really preferred walking to school and back. Notwithstanding the threats,, she continued to attend class every day, right until the day she was shot. Malala's quiet confidence in the Taliban's apparent unwillingness to hurt young girls ended when a Colt .45 was aimed at her and her two friends at midday on 9th October 2012. The fallout of the incident and her life thereafter is now the stuff of legend.

The bullet that shot Malala went through her left eye socket and out under her left shoulder. She was taken immediately to the nearest

hospital, but quickly transported by helicopter to one with better facilities. On 15th October, Malala was flown to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England, so she could get the extensive treatment she needed. She then said, "I come from a country that was created at midnight. When I almost died, it was just after midday."

"The assassination plot turned out to be a tactical error. I realized what the **Taliban** had done," Malala writes, "was to make my campaign global." The Pakistani government condemned the **Taliban** for the attack, and launched a manhunt for her attackers. Malala has since won many awards, addressed the United Nations, and been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Every year, November 10 is celebrated the world over as "Malala Day." While traveling to a conference in 2011, Malala saw a young girl selling oranges and keeping track of what she sold by making marks on a piece of paper, since she could neither read nor write. "I took a photo of her and vowed I would do everything in my power to help educate girls just like her," Malala declared.

In the West, it is very rare to see a girl being denied an education. But that is not necessarily the case elsewhere, especially in countries such as Pakistan. Malala and her story are symbolic of the freedom education brings in its wake, and the book delivers such a message to the world.

George Washington University and the Global Women's Institute have collaborated to develop a university-level curriculum based on **I am Malala** to work across sundry academic disciplines. The tools focus on themes such as the following: how education empowers women, global feminism, political extremism and youth advocacy. One of the goals of the program is to encourage college students and, eventually, high school students - to get involved, to facilitate dialogue among various groups, and to influence public opinion about access to education and women's rights.

We cannot just ignore this book or Malala's struggle because inequality and illiteracy still persist in our country, with a global rank of 26, and the average years of education for the poorest 17-22-year-old females being only 2.9 years. When a fourteen-year-old girl can voice her

opinion against a fearsome power like the Taliban, surely we, as Indian citizens, can do much better, with democracy being arguably the greatest gift conferred upon each of us.

Terrorism is doubtless a great threat to the world, yet we are made to also understand that Islam offers equal protection to women and uphold their rights when we come across statements such as these ... The Quran says we should seek knowledge, study hard and learn the mysteries of our world Or The Holy Quran clearly says it is wrong to kill Freedom is offered to men and women alike, brought alive with sensitivity in lines that read thus ... we learned that the first wife of the Prophet was a businesswoman called Khadijah. She was forty, fifteen years older than him, and she had been married before, yet he still married her . Despite these hard facts, it is inexplicable that the Taliban seek to impose a culture so against the tenets upheld in the Quran, and all in the name of Islam.

The world is developing at a pace that boggles the imagination, on all fronts, including education. When terrorists or antigovernmental forces act against education, it is inconceivable for the nations of the world to refrain from reining in these elements. The United Nations has adopted Millennium Development Goals, with goal 2 - the achievement of universal primary education - being of special significance in a country like Pakistan where 5.1 million children have not yet been enrolled in primary education. The voice of Malala, however, has helped bring this issue into the world's focus.

The real problem started when the Russians invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and the United States and Britain offered their support to uproot the red Communist army from Afghanistan, the point at which the Taliban became the formidable force that came to be known as the Taliban. That was when Osama Bin Laden, a multimillionaire from Saudi Arabia, stepped into the Taliban as a volunteer. A question that arises at this stage, as one contemplates the Western idea of democratisation, is how invading other nations could possibly be termed a march towards the democratic process. Do these nations tacitly acknowledge that en masse killings, massacres or wars are a democratic way of resolving

disputes among neighboring nations? It is also scary to think of the status quo of Republican India, given these instances of unwarranted intrusion, as the Indian constitution is enshrined with provisions similar to those of Western democratic countries.

“Children in refugee camps were even given school textbooks produced by an American university, which taught basic arithmetic through fighting. They had examples like, 'If, out of 10 Russian infidels, 5 are killed by one Muslim, 5 would be left' or '15 bullets 10 bullets = 5 bullets.'”

What is America's real motive in this war: to help raise a generation of children who resent neighbouring nations, or to actively encourage the emergence of anti-national, insurgents?

Everyone ought to read this book as it narrates both contemporary history as well as a single girl's uphill struggle for education - not only for herself, but for the entire community. Issues staring the whole community in the face would have died a natural death had Malala not chosen to raise her voice and face certain death by speaking up - rather than opt to keep silent and stay safe - as she addressed the UN at New York.

This points to the role and responsibilities of fellow citizens in resolving problems faced by the general public. She has also proved the truth of the words of her own countryman, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, that there is a third power stronger than the sword and pen, which is that of women. Malala and her father have together created the Malala Fund that supports education for women, working alongside the Global Partnership for Education to help other children - especially girls - of other nations who have been deprived their basic right to education.

I am Malala is a compelling read of a remarkable young woman and a hero for women's right to a quality education. It is a book that teens and adults will find meaningful. It certainly will make readers a lot more thankful for the educational opportunities we are afforded in this country.

“Honour your daughters. They are honourable.” Malala Yousafzai